

National Forest Service, Forest Plan Revision
Preliminary “Need To Change” January workshops
Public Input Report
Inyo National Forest Public Workshop
January 30, 2014

Prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy

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Introduction

The Inyo National Forest (INF) Public Workshop regarding the Forest Plan Revision preliminary “Need to Change” was held on January 30 at the Forest Supervisor’s Office in Bishop, CA. Sixty-one members of the public signed in. Staff conservatively estimate that seventy members of the public attended.

Mammoth Lakes District Ranger Jon Regelbrugge welcomed attendees on behalf of Inyo Forest Supervisor Ed Armenta, who could not attend the meeting due to a death in his family. The agenda included presentations, discussion, and questions and answers regarding Forest Plan Revision, the preliminary “Need to Change” document, desired conditions for the Forest, and the unique roles and contributions of the Forest. The presenters were members of the Regional Planning Team Deb Whitall, Acting Director of Planning for Forest Service Region 5; Jo Ann Fites-Kaufman, Ecologist, U.S. Forest Service; Mary Cole, Landscape Architect, Sequoia National Forest; and Mark Metcalfe, Economist, U.S. Forest Service. Members of the public were also provided with opportunities to interact with Regional and Inyo Forest staff and each other during an “open house” and small group discussion tables. Meeting materials and presentations are posted to the Region 5 Planning website:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r5/landmanagement/planning>.

The purpose of this report is to assemble public input received during the workshop, either verbally (as captured by staff note-takers) or on comment cards. Comments sent via email or post before or after the workshop will be assembled in a separate report.

This report was prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy with the intent to neutrally categorize and summarize the input generated at the workshop.

Input by topic area

Input received at the Inyo Public Workshop is organized by the 5 topic areas from the preliminary “Need to Change”, plus a category for “other / overarching” input. Within each section, comments are subdivided as either **refinements** to the Need to Change, **clarifications** of text in the Need to Change, “**missing**” from the Need to Change, statements of **desired conditions** for the Forest, or **project / activity specific input**. Subcategories in each topic area are only listed if input pertaining to that subcategory was received.

Five written comment cards were received at this meeting. Remarks from the comment cards are shown in quotation marks; diverse ideas submitted on a single comment card may appear in different topic areas as appropriate. All other input is derived from notes taken by Forest Service staff and the meeting facilitator.

1. Vegetation, resilience, wildlife and fire

Refinements

- FS is philosophically moving away from piecemeal and going more toward integrated; general support for FS moving toward new paradigm of looking at the whole. Integrated, coarse filters are better than single-species approaches. This will help with allocating resources toward whole ecosystems, not just a few locations and species. However, don’t demonize single species approach and the idea of indicator species. The Planning Rule has both coarse and fine filters. Don’t take the coarse filter approach too far.
- Ranchers would like to see more use of grazing to reduce wildland fuels. Open to burning to reduce old, decadent brush unsuitable for cattle. Not too concerned about cheatgrass – not optimal, but edible by cows. Concerned about the large set-asides for Bighorn Sheep that take allotments out of grazing by cattle. Concern about other invasive species, like pepperweed in drainages.
- Not enough capacity on the Forest to take advantage of citizen monitoring partnerships. There is not enough pre- and post- fuel treatment monitoring.
- Cattle grazing is one of best fire reduction programs.
- Selective logging (commercial) is a good fire-reduction strategy.
- The desert tortoise is a good example of 25 years of research, and we still don’t know what to do. Maybe we need to learn that lesson. At what point do we decide not to save?

Clarifications

- Resilience is not well defined.

Missing

- Is there a statewide plan being developed, possibly through CalFire, for standards on power line corridor fuel reduction? FERC has standards for hydropower generation lines, but is there something being developed for all transmission lines?
- Wildlife got shortchanged in need for change given the emphasis themes.
- What are the specific steps that the plan will address in species listings?

Desired Conditions

- Support for prescribed fire within designated wilderness, though the Red Meadow salvage sale was a missed opportunity for crosscut saw use / training / partnerships. The Rainbow Fire was mentioned by a participant as an example of a good result.
- Most folks in the small discussion group were okay with more general desired condition statements, so long as specific objectives were included in project-level plans. One person mention “nested” or “tiered” desired conditions, which line up with the Coconino NF desired condition examples. A few folks preferred narrow, specific desired conditions due to lack of trust in land manager’s intent.
- You can’t make blanket statements about species, for example, one statement for all Jeffery Pine stands.
- Climate change is forcing us to manage for more extreme conditions, but desired conditions should be attainable.
- Habitat fragmentation, need more emphasis on connectivity. Highway 395 is a Cuisinart; use partnerships for crossings. Connectivity would be a good desired condition.

Project / activity specific input

- “I am glad to see strong emphasis on wildfires. We have had several fires in the Bishop Creek drainage in the Buttermilk areas in the last decade. A large fire could destroy the residences and campgrounds thereby having devastating effects on the Eastern Sierra economy. The Aspendell and South Fork communities have formed a joint fire department and it is important that the Inyo National Forest works with these communities for a united approach.”
- “Prohibit outdoor fires in all campgrounds and summer home tracts on windy nights, especially in the warmer months. This could be easily enforced by campground hosts and signage. New culture group/forest users and some urbanites lack experience to make a connection between campfires, wind and surrounding dry vegetation.”

- Mammoth Economic Development would like to coordinate their campaign to attract photographers for the fall colors with any prescribed fire activity planned on the Inyo or on the West Side Forests. Concerned about eastside and westside smoke.

2. *Wildland Urban Interface*

Refinements

- Green dump- FS burn piles.
- How to partner with local volunteer fire departments. 4WD club would like to partner also.
- There is heavy brush cover; decadent. Grazing opportunities to reduce bitter brush.

3. *Meadows*

Refinements

- UC Davis Meadows Clearing House can help collate meadows information.
- Some areas are really resilient (Salt Lake).
- Partnership with ranchers and packers.

Clarifications

- What will be different for Inyo as opposed to other forests?
- Need explanation of what a desired condition is and objectives.
- How does Kern analysis (EIS) relate to FPR? Which desired conditions, standards, etc. will that be under?
- How often are things being monitored?
- Was historical grazing the cause of degraded meadow conditions?
- What was the condition when 1988 plan started compared to what's the condition today. Have headcuts been fixed? Assessment didn't make connection between existing management (1988 plan) and need to change and current conditions.

Desired conditions

- Need more reasonable desired conditions.
- Enhance opportunities for collaboration.
- Rest rotation is a good grazing strategy. Participant using mowing in some cases (in Owens Valley) to 'strengthen roots' of grasses.
- Continue fighting meadow encroachment by lodgepole.
- Meadows should be separately treated from riparian.
- Tie vegetation monitoring plot to adjacent stream and management strategies for other resources. This is a really short time period to get everything tied together, considering the state of research.

- Fencing left behind by past operations distracts from the wilderness quality. Need to pull wire, and need plan to pull wire in the future for non-use areas. Accountability for fences should be clear.
- Make scientific info (study results, monitoring) more available.

Project / Activity Specific

- Cattle grazing permittee can get grant money to help Bishop Tribe and INF with Coyote Meadow restoration.
- Have a poster sheet with questions for meadow session at Calistoga conference to help promote dialogue.
- SNARL is willing to help with developing stream / riparian / meadow desired conditions using a reference database he has been involved with developing. Recommends getting reference stream, not as a particular existing stream, but from collective stream information.

4. Aquatic and Riparian

Refinements

- Dropping water tables are of concern. DWP owns most space.
- Work with other agencies, particularly DWP, to protect freshwater resources.
- Groundwater is a critical resource. The region overdrafts every year, e.g. Mammoth Mountain ski area. How much pumped water ends up back in water table? Pumping water means that water ends up going somewhere else, not back to aquifer. Also, salts used in snowmaking turned up in Big Springs.
- Concerned about making water available for community activities, including uses beyond just the forest.
- As sustainable recreation increases, and water becomes scarce. How do we balance that with wildlife?

Clarifications

- The statement in NTC document 'There is uncertainty about the impacts of different land uses on water quality from meadows.' Is not clear. What exactly needs to change?

Missing

- Could a statewide database be used in determining ideal conditions for Eastside streams?
- Clean Water Act also includes language about natural habitat, not just physical – so we have to define what natural means.

Desired conditions

- No lows.
- Include protection of sage grouse and aspen.

- Include groundwater desired conditions.
- Fuel reduction is accomplished using historical uses like cattle grazing and commercial selective logging.
- Participant has been working 15 years to improve stream bank conditions on Coyote with shovel, rocks, and moving water to channels developed by tribe. Participant encouraged to bring photos of his desired condition (where he accomplished channel improvement).
- Desired conditions should be based on 'natural' conditions, using statewide data, not 'human generated' ideas of what that looks like. What is the natural range of variability? Need to study intact systems to see what the natural condition should be. Define what is natural. Use specific statements. Reference condition (ideally pristine). What's the realistic most intact system? Use GIS available information, including watershed conditions like roadedness.
- Identify not just priority watershed, but "ideal natural system" – specific attributes.
- Desired conditions should be more measurable than currently.
- Enhance opportunities for collaborative/partner help.
- How we define desired condition for aquatics will affect multiple use, hydropower, and infrastructure. FERC licensing may change to better simulate natural timing of flows.
- Issue of climate change, can ameliorate those effects by timing hydropower releases. This can be looked at as a solution rather than a problem.
- Example objectives / desired conditions are so aspirational, very general. Maybe there is hope to get to more specific goals.
- It would be helpful to have examples that are more specific to us, rather than Arizona, and it would have been helpful to have those ahead of time.
- Some examples of desired conditions are very human specific (water is drinkable, swimmable, etc.)

Project / activity specific input

- Partner with tribe for Colgate Restoration, can get grant money.
- Work with user groups not to camp/park in most delicate areas, may involve coordination with other agencies or landowners. Example: camping at a spring in the Buttermilks on DWP land that is accessed on INF road crossing McGee Creek and other riparian areas on S side of Buttermilk road.
- Revisited Big Whitney Meadow after rest period and the meadows look like they are ready to die. They look overgrown and ready to burn. Stream banks looked good. Trails that had been developed by cowboys had become overgrown and difficult to find (negative condition in participant's opinion). There was a suggestion from another participant that the 'overgrown' condition was healthy.

- Outreach to hikers regarding the value of pack stock supported work.

5. Sustainable Recreation

Refinements

- Concern of resource damage in heavily visited areas. Human guides can help encourage use in other areas.
- Capacity issues. Need to streamline special use permitting process.
- Re: Special use permits and carrying capacity, quota system seems arbitrary.
- The need to change should talk about areas outside of developed sites. Developed sites provide amenities and protect resources. Dispersed areas have cumulative impacts. Dispersing use not a solution for high use. Drier climates are limited in their ability to recover.
- Be more cautious of choices. Dispersed use is working well in some areas, not in others.
- Roads are going away due to lack of use.
- Has wilderness designations limited use of the areas? There is no real “pristine” wilderness.
- Needs can be met with partners. Trail maintenance, scientific data collecting, etc. How can recreation communities partner with the agency to address needs? Can the plan address how partnerships can help the forest? Current plan doesn’t prohibit partnerships, but can the new plan help to facilitate partnerships? E.g. Sequoia Monument partnership framework. Capacity assessment is outlined in Sequoia Monument partnership strategy.
- Sustainable recreation is the biggest gap: users are not in the room, and FS is not getting message. Better communication to all user groups. Is USDA working on social media strategy?
- Bringing people into urbanized areas (Mammoth output). Speak to utilizing urban center. Trails in “urban” forest areas. Leaving from urban areas to trails to reduce impacts in more primitive areas. Want program to recognize these urban/forest recreation sites. Partner with gateway communities.
- Want to keep historical value of packstock sustainable.
- Sustainable recreation includes partners and communities. Tourism is so important to local economies.
- Agency doesn’t have capacity to fulfill this mission. Agency has capacity to engage with parties to accomplish goals. Leverage that capacity.
- Have an outreach/marketing cooperative with partners to communicate land values to the public.

Clarifications

- “In the section on ‘Sustainable Recreation’, they reference the ‘local communities in the Central Valley and Southern Sierras’ but do not mention the Eastern Sierra. I understand that this document covers three National Forests but it appears they forgot the Eastern Sierra Communities. Furthermore, my concern is how they would plan to ‘incorporate ecosystem and cultural context into scenery management.’”

Missing

- How can you restore meadows and say that’s what you want the Forest to look like when there’s no water? LA Department of Water and Power owns so much eastside water, and is not mentioned.

Desired conditions

- Recreation community that better understands each other. The whole spectrum better integrated and understood. We have more in common with each other than with anyone else at planning level. Recreation can set the tone.
- Bottom line is recreation. It’s the primary purpose.
- Keep historical grazing, packing used in the plan.
- Water as a primary interest for all groups. Tribes working with communities to protect the water and land.
- Roadless areas have jeep trails. Keep roads there.
- Recreation aviation. There are 5 airstrips within Inyo – would like to try to bring them back.

Project / activity specific input

- “Buttermilk area of INF is one of the most heavily used parts of the forest during the fall, winter, and spring. Current use / management is not sustainable. Dispersed recreation concepts not applicable to this world-renowned climbing area. This is an area with complex land ownership issues. There is need for collaborative management involving Forest Service, LA DWP, and County of Inyo.”
- “Re special use permits, specifically fishing guiding permits: I would like to see the permitting process timeline change from every year to 5 or 10 years. Forest service employees have trouble doing these every year. Also I would like to have various location options beyond my current one of San Joaquin river/Hot Creek. Other areas of interest would be mammoth lakes basin June Lake Loop, Bishop and Bio Pine Creeks.”
- Guides and guided services to get people out in the forest. They can have a facilitated visitor experience with a stewardship message.
- Urban climbers need a lot of immediate outreach and need to be educated to protect resources for the future.

- Volunteers are closing roads in Chalfont Valley, which is narrowing use instead of spreading it out. Keep areas open and available.
- June Lake junction. We provide, water, trash disposal, and toilets, which are key to recreation use of all kinds. Expecting OHV use to increase and impacts to increase. June lake junction want to meet these basic needs; FS unable to administer my permit. Don't know how to plan for the future. Business owners have questions, being on the forest limits ability to grow.

6. Other / Overarching

- “I don't know where the title ‘need to change’ came from but I hope it doesn't mean change just for change's sake. I'm skeptical about ‘change’ on the forest because a lot of roads have been blocked off unnecessarily during the recent travel management process. Good roads with purpose like guzzler management have been blocked off. Make sure changes are ‘improvements’ for public use not just restrictions and closures.”
- Why the rush to complete in 2 years instead of 3-4 allowed by Planning Rule? It seems too compressed, too overwhelming to staff.
- There is such a short time frame to make critical decisions. How to frame desired conditions and objectives in 1–2 months? Can't just look at TES; taking an integrated approach will be good.
- People like our FS employees but don't like bureaucracy and have issues with the agency itself. The bureaucracy stops good things from happening.
- Difficulty with collaborating with the forest service. Perception is that the forest service is inaccessible.
- Why are you not documenting existing partnerships? There is a lot going on that is not reflected in the Need to Change.
- Will there be guidance/ framework/ direction on partnerships in the Plan?
- Concept of “multiple uses” is being lost in terminology and in practice.
- How are desired condition write-ups for one area integrated with other emphasis areas' desired conditions?
- One advantage we have here is small communities. Our plans can have the goal of just being self sustaining, not big growth.

Missing

- Wind, solar, mining, and geothermal not mentioned.
- Inyo is in the Great Basin. This should be reflected.
- Will land adjustments and acquisitions be a product of this process?
- Wilderness was not addressed as in the FACA requirements. Need to consider wilderness areas in an integrated way.

- Need for change doesn't identify things like roads and infrastructure. These areas should be included. Are some ML 1 and 2 roads going to be evaluated?
- Climate change should be its own area.
- Wildlife should be its own emphasis area. There is a need for change in management because otherwise there wouldn't be so many species at risk.

Conclusion / Major Themes

Attendees at this Inyo Public Workshop provided numerous specific suggests at both a Forest Plan level and a project / activity specific level. There was general support for "coarse filter" landscape restoration approaches, but caution to also provide for the specific needs of wildlife in general and species of concern. Many participants emphasized the use of science and good data in developing desired conditions (including taking advantage of abundant existing data and analyses), and there was concern that the timeframe for Forest Plan Revision would not give adequate time to develop these. The relationship between grazing and meadows is of particular concern for the Inyo, as is the fate of water and groundwater resources. Finally, the communities surrounding the Inyo are highly dependent on the Forest, and discussions reflected the need to provide abundant recreation and multiple uses while sustaining the resource. Many attendees stressed the value of partnerships and volunteerism to bolster Forest capacity, and hoped that the Forest will be better able to facilitate these relationships in the future.